

## New River Ceasing Operations October 31st

Written by Steve Frank

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Operations at New River Behavioral Healthcare will cease after Monday, with Daymark opening to serve the five county area Tuesday—that from the new board charged with the task of closing New River. The board met all afternoon yesterday, mostly in executive session, emerging to act on terminating all but a skeleton crew of New River employees after October 31st, then dealing with the pressing issue of helping Daymark set up in current New River facilities. The one ‘nay’ vote of the session came from Watauga Commission chair Nathan Miller, who voted against the motion on leasing New River properties, and after the meeting I asked him why, “I thought the leases were too little. I think it was \$3 a square foot per year. And I don’t know the market rates in Wilkes, Alleghany, Ashe, or Avery, however I feel it is more than \$3 a year. Now, it’s more than those counties are presently getting because they are New River owned buildings and New River is in them, but I think we should charge more. Watauga County owns our buildings. That will be before the Watauga County Commission,” and that meeting is next Tuesday.

And that action will come at next Tuesday’s Watauga Commission meeting. The board is still dealing with many money issues from New River, and Miller said that the board is still working to pay as money is available, “We don’t really know where we’re landing on the audits; we know what we have cash on hand, we know what our expenses are, so that’s what we’re operating off of.” On the issue of the fraud allegations, Miller said that the new leadership over New River testified this week on those issues that were the final nail in New River’s coffin, and are awaiting a decision there before they will really know the cash they can count on in closing down New River. One other contentious issue is that of New River’s patient records, made more contentious in that Smoky Mountain made a demand for a plan for the records by midnight last night, and in that Smoky Mountain was ultimately behind the Medicaid audit, there were thoughts that they might file a complaint against New River over that issue, but it was pointed out that board action late yesterday kept in place employees to deal with medical records.